

BOOK REVIEW
How To Argue And Win Every Time
by Gerry Spence
reviewed by Joseph C. Piff

The active words in the title of this book are “argue” and “win.” Let’s start with a broad definition of “argue.” Mr. Spence uses the term in its broadest sense – any disagreement between two or more people is an opportunity for argument. And an opportunity for argument is an opportunity to improve the condition of the human race, or at least a few members thereof. “Argument is the mechanism by which we reveal the truth – the truth for us. It is the incomparable art by which we connect and interact successfully with the *Other*.”

How To Argue and Win Every Time is basically a textbook on human relations. Mr. Spence was born, raised, and educated (law degree) in Wyoming and has lived all of his life in the small towns of that State. Therefore, he can be described as a country lawyer, although a very good one. He has not lost a criminal case in his entire career of over 40 years. I also detect some influence on him from the Native American culture. In the “About the Author” section of the book, we find the following:

“Spence believes that argument begins with the person, and that to argue successfully one must accomplish more than mere technique. He maintains that success in argument, as in life, is a derivative of personal growth, of discovering who we are, and embracing the uniqueness that is individual to each of us.”

The book is divided into three parts: Readyng Ourselves to Win, Delivering the Winning Argument, and Arguments in Love and War. The first part builds Mr. Spence’s credibility and defines the basis of his thesis – what you need to know about the art of arguing and how you need to act. Part II describes how to deliver the winning argument – the structure, the rapport with the target audience, the delivery, and the close. Part III gets into your life – arguing at home, with kids, at the workplace, and for justice.

So what is winning? “*Winning is getting what we want*, which often includes assisting others in getting what they want. Winning may forward a just cause. It may help strangers. It may deliver truth. Winning may help a loved one succeed, a child to bloom, an enemy to see us in a new light. But, whether winning is winning for ourselves or for others, winning is still *getting what we want*.” This is one of 1 ½ columns of references on “winning” or the “winning argument” in the index of the book, not including “losing by winning” and “winning by losing.” Only “arguing” and “argument” have a longer listing. In other words, Mr. Spence is true to his title throughout the book.

Mr. Spence has a very comfortable writing style. He has appeared with and for Larry King, hosts his own weekly talk show on CNBC, and knows how to use language to connect with the audience. Therefore, this book was very enjoyable to read. Sometimes Mr. Spence comes across as a cynical lawyer – and these may be some of the most enjoyable parts of the book! Are you going to read Chapter 15 (Arguing at the Workplace) first? If you are extremely time limited, that is better than nothing, but I think the whole book is valuable reading, especially if you can take it to heart and use it in your daily life.